Castlemaine Naturalist
April 2000
Vol. 22.3 #265

Upper Loddon Forest and Waterways 10/3/00

Our excursion, following a most interesting talk from guest speaker Greg Peters from the North Central Catchment Management Authority on Friday night, was in fine, warm to hot conditions. We headed for the hills for some first hand observations, with a very good attendance of 21 naturalists in a convoy of six vehicles.

Our first stop was the Loddon River at Warburton's Bridge with the objective of observing and recording the streamside vegetation and wildlife. Natalie de Maccus kindly took on the major task of identifying and recording the group's observations and we all contributed to the bird list.

Our next stop was Middleton's Creek to compare our findings with those at the first stop. From there it was on to Jacob's Track for an enjoyable stroll through this section of the upper Loddon Forest and a search for Ern Perkins' unusual Grevillia. We were unable to find it, so that will be a good excuse for a return trip to this lovely area.

We then headed to Glenlyon and the Upper Loddon Falls for afternoon tea (latish) and an assessment of the area. We were all very impressed with the falls and surrounds, but only one member managed the steep and prickly climb down to the river bed and back. Yes! you have probably guessed right. It was Stan Bruton, who then introduced us to the manna on the ground under the giant Manna Gum that we were picnicking under.

On the return journey we stopped off at a lovely little mineral spring for refreshments and returned home via Mt. Franklin and Guildford. I think everyone had a very enjoyable and educational excursion into a very small section of a very large forest.

The bird list was not extensive, with no rarities. Spotted Pardalotes were in abundance, as were Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters and the Eastern Spinebill was the best of the rest.

Ken Dredge

V.F.N.C.A. Geelong Campout

Four club members attended the Geelong Campout, Ern and Lesley Perkins, Mira Berenyi and Rita Mills, and we seemed to go in three different directions each day. The highlights of my own trip were the Mud Island excursion and the morning on the rock platform below the Point Lonsdale lighthouse exploring the rock pools.

We were told that there were fewer waders on Mud Island than usual at this time of year, but the trip out was smooth and the sight of the silhouetted pelicans and swans on the sandbars as we approached the island, the light on the water, the myriad of small blue butterflies, the waders we did see, the Golden-headed Cisticolas and Grass Birds and the brilliant colours of the samphire made it a day I certainly will not forget in a hurry. To add to my pleasure I was lent a face mask and snorkel and spent a few minutes after lunch snorkeling in one of the pools. It was pure magic. Where I was there was just sea grass, fish fry and shrimps, but it was very tantalising. I could very easily become addicted!

The hours spent on the rock platform with some of the marine group from the Geelong club was a real eye opener. Highlights for me, as they carefully turned over rocks in rock pools, were the large elephant snails, which covered their almost rectangular shell with their mantle, beautifully patterned little shells with their owners still crawling around, a Tulip shell which had captured a black herbivorous snail (I was holding the Tulip shell when it "spat" out the shell it was holding, and it was completely empty and clean as a whistle), the different algae, the brittle stars and the rich, varied colours of the most common sea star.

Best of all though was the drama of discovering an octopus which had captured a crayfish. It lost it when the rock it was under was turned over, but it wasn't too worried about us; it was much more interested in recapturing its dinner. It finally gave up when the crayfish gave it a good nip (apparently) and it came shooting back out from under the ledge where it had followed the crustacean. Its head popped above the water in seeming surprise, and then it decided to squeeze under another rock for a while. We were joined by quite a few outsiders during this drama, including several children who were quite reluctant to leave. I'm sure they had a very interesting subject for Show and Tell at school on Tuesday morning!

Some of the special birds I saw over the weekend were - Hooded Plovers on Lake Lonsdale mudflats, Eastern Curlews, Curlew Sandpipers, scores of Red-capped Dotterels, the cisticolas and Grassbirds, Black-faced Cormorants and the Gannets, including and African one, on one of the light buoys.

Rita Mills

A trip to the Western Treatment Works

One of the outings during the Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association campout on the recent long weekend was to the Werribee Sewerage Farm, now renamed the Western Treatment Plant. We were fortunate to have Trevor Pescott as our guide. Most issues of the *Bird Observer* seem to mention this area, and Lesley and I took the occasion to make our first visit. Entry is by permit only, and permits last for two years, so we now have the ability to make more visits over the next two years. Perhaps when a new bird is sighted there, we could make a quick visit.

However, I was not prepared for the sheer size of the farm. It is about 20 km by 10 km, and divided by a network of roads. There is also a large range of habitats - farmland, lagoons, lakes, swamps and marshlands, salt-bush flats, scrublands, paperbark clumps and coastline. There are many interesting swampland plants. It would take much longer than a one day visit to see it all.

There were lots of birds. Waders were plentiful, but fewer, we were told, than a few weeks ago, as some had started to move northwards. One of the interesting sightings was the Golden Headed Cisticolas. I thought at first they were sparrows, because of the flock. One obligingly sat up on a rush in full view. Other interesting sightings were the Singing Honeyeater, Blue-billed Duck, and a milk-coffee coloured Welcome Swallow.

E Perkins

By Sea and Shore

On Saturday morning our group went on a Marine Biology/Oceanography cruise lead by Mark from the Marine Biology Centre, Queenscliffe. He told us a lot about various seaweeds, or algae, and other marine life, and also a bit about the work they are doing at MBC.

Well out from the shore we started to drag a sort of cage behind us. It went deep down to the seabed and was pulled up full of seaweed and sea creatures. In the middle of the boat were a lot of shallow trays of sea water. The contents of the cage were emptied into these trays and we started to sort through the seaweeds to see what we could find, putting our finds into different containers of sea water. We caught a lot of crabs, mainly Decorator Crabs, which camouflage themselves with algae. There were also small fishes, seastars, tube worms, sponges, sea anemones and other sea creatures. After we had finished sorting through and had a good look at our finds it was all emptied back into the sea again.

We were also taken to the rocks which are an artificial reef and Marine Park, and there saw a lot of seals, and to a buoy platform where we saw a lot of Australian Gannets, along with the descendants of the South African Gannet which came here some years ago. One of the gannets was a juvenile and was still fluffy with down. As a bonus we saw many dolphins all around or boat.

On Sunday there was an all day excursion to Breamlea, Black Rock and Barwon Heads. At Breamlea we were met by two local members of Geelong FNC and they first took us down by the creek and told us of the flora of the salt-marshes. We didn't see many birds, only some Greenshanks and Silver Gulls and a White-faced Heron. Later we walked along the beach and I was lucky enough to find a lovely sea shell in one of the rock pools. We had a look at different seaweeds and were told a lot about them. One of the ladies had been studying seaweeds for a year. While we were having lunch she went home and returned with some pressed seaweed. It was very beautiful. She warned us that one has to be very careful handling it, and that it must not be exposed to too much light or it will lose its colour.

In the afternoon we went to Black Rock where we visited aboriginal middens and some rock formations. It was hard going along the shore at high tide but we did see a seal frolicking in the water, some Pacific gulls and, sadly, a dead Fairy Penguin. We got to Barwon Heads fairly late, and it was very hot and I was pretty tired, so it was lovely to paddle a bit in the sea.

Mira Berenyi

Adopt-a-Highway

✓N.B. Highway cleanup 15/4/00, 8 - 9 am. Meet at Tait's Coach workshop. ◂

Swift Parrot Surveys

These will be held on May 20-21 and Aug 5-6. Details of the May survey in the next CN.

Castlemaine Golf Club has adopted the Grey-crowned Babbler as their emblem. There are three known birds in the district, all living on the golf course somewhere.

Spring/Summer Bird List for Happy Valley

Great Egret
White-faced Heron
Straw-necked Ibis
White Ibis
Black Duck
Wood Duck
Brown Goshawk
Wedgetailed Eagle
Little Eagle
Nankeen Kestrel
Brown Falcon
Little Falcon (Hobby)
Whistling Kite
Masked Lapwing
Crested Pigeon
Eastern Rosella
Crimson Rosella
Kookaburra
Welcome Swallow
Sparrow
Blackbird
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Rufous Whistler
Grey Shrike-thrush
Willie Wagtail
Eastern Yellow Robin
Blue Wren
Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Mistletoe bird
Spotted Pardalote
Striated Pardalote
Magpie
Australian Raven
Little Raven
Red-browed Finch
Goldfinch
Grey Currawong
Horsfields Bronze-Cuckoo
Fantailed Cuckoo
Pallid Cuckoo
Reed Warbler
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo
Weebill

Feral Pigeon
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Galah
Long-billed. Corella
Musk Lorikeet
Brown Thornbill
Red Wattlebird
New Holland Honeyeater
Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Brown-headed Honeyeater
Silvereye
Common Bronzewing
Spotted Turtledove
Starling
Indian Mynah
White-throated Needletail

59 count

Additional birds from Pennyweight Flat Gully, adjoining Happy Valley -

Little Lorikeet
Sacred Kingfisher
Brown Treecreeper
White-br owed Scrub-wren
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Fuscous Honeyeater
White-plumed Honeyeater
Black-chinned Honeyeater
White-naped Honeyeater
Eastern Spinebill
Scarlet Robin
Varied Sitella
Crested Shrike-tit
Grey Fantail
White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike
White-winged Triller
Olive-backed Oriole
Dusky Woodswallow
White-winged Chough

19 count

for a total of 78 species

Ken and Maureen Dredge

Observations

- Beverly Mary Hill reports Crimson Rosellas, 4 adults and 3 juveniles, at her home in James Street.
- More than eight Rainbow Bee-eaters were seen by Penny Garnett in Coliban Park Road, Sutton Grange.
- Four European Wasps came to collect the caterpillars that George Broadway had squashed on the ground.
- Rita Mills twice found a European wasp attacking and starting to devour ("eat" is too mild a term for it!) a blowfly. Also, although he hasn't been stung, Rita's cat is reluctant to stay in his cage when the wasps are there.
- Tony Morton has found 150 Wood White Butterfly caterpillars on Wiry Mistletoe on Cootamundra Wattles in Kalimna.
- George Broadway reports that the webs of Golden Orb Web spiders and Little Jewel spiders are amore prevalent than usual in Muckleford forest.
- Spotted in the Happy Valley area on 12/3 - a Little Eagle feeding on a rabbit on the ground and then circling slowly overhead. The family of Little (White-bellied) Cuckoo-shrikes are still in their same area. One pair (possibly more) of Fantailed Cuckoos are in residence. They were also recorded in December and February. Several small flocks of Little Lorikeets were seen feeding in foliage. Ken Dredge and Jim Young.
- Also from Ken and Jim. There have been regular sightings of White-throated Needletails travelling east-west, minutes before sunset on each occasion.
- On Mud Island Fork-tailed Swifts started hawking over the salt bush just before the wind started to get up about lunchtime. Rita Mills.
- John Turnbull first noted Spreading Wattle flowering on his property this month (March). Spreading Wattle is often seen in flower as early as January in the district, but seems to vary considerably from area to area.

- Broadways have had resident Bluetongues for some years, but over the last couple of years the very large old animal was replaced with one about half its size, which has been replaced in its turn this year by one half *its* size!
- From Rita Mills. Seen 25/3 in Wattleflat bush near Escape Track, a juvenile Pallid Cuckoo bashing a hairy caterpillar to death. On the same day on the ridge at the north end of Youngman's track, a swarm of very large flying ants, which appeared to be black Bulldog Ants.
- Beverly Mary Hill reports having found, on 27/2/00, a goanna which had been hit by a car on the middle of the Newstead road near the Maldon turn-off. She shifted it beyond the gutter, and this gives rise to something which has been bothering her - *Question* - What is the law concerning shifting dead animals off the road? Does anyone know? There seems to be a good deal of conflicting opinion, but does anyone know what the law actually is?

Plant list for the March Excursion

Warburton's Bridge Silver Wattle (Acacia dealbata), Blackwood (A. melanoxylon), Wirilda (A. retinoides), River Redgum (Eucalyptus camaldulensis), Long-leaf Box (E. gonyocalyx), Yellow Gum (E. leucoxylon), Yellow Box (E. meliodora), Grey Box (E. microcarpa), Manna Gum (E. viminalis), River Bottlebrush (Callistemon seiberi), Water Ribbons (Triglochin procerus) and assorted rushes and reeds beyond identification. Middletons Bridge Wirilda, River Red Gum, Yellow Box, Long-leaf Box, Red Box (E. polyanthemos), Manna Gum, a tiny bluebell (Wahlenbergia sp.), Kangaroo grass (Thelmeda triandra) and a number of large tussock grasses. Jacobs Track Gold Dust Wattle (A. acinacea), Silver Wattle, Hedge Wattle (A. paradoxa), Red Stringybark (E. macrorhyncha), Yellow Box, Grey Box, Long-leaf Box, Red Box, Common Cassinia (C. arculeata), Coffee Bush (C. arcuata), Honeypots (Acrotriche serrulata), Black-anther Flax Lily (Dianella revoluta), Purple Coral Pea or False Sarsaparilla (Hardenbergia violacea), Running Postman (Kennedia prostrata), Blunt-leaf Bitter Pea (Davisia leptophylla), two Dillwinias, a Senecio, Matted Bush Pea (Pultenaea pedunculata), a larger bluebell (W. gracilenta?), Daphne Heath (Brachyloma daphnoides), Stinking Pennywort (Hydrocotyle laxiflora), Mat-rush (Lomandra sp.) Small St. Johns Wort (Hypericum gramineum), Kangaroo Grass, assorted grasses and rushes.Loddon Falls Silver Wattle, Blackwood, Manna Gum, Tree Violet (Hymenanthera dentata), Heath Teatree (Leptospermum myrsenoides), Bluebell (same as on Jacob's track), assorted grasses.

Natalie de Maccus

Welcome to the Club Jenny and Tony Morton and Robyn and Merleen Holden.

Invitation from FOBIF -

"CFNC members are invited to an important meeting to the Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests (Mount Alexander Region) on **Wed April 26 at 7-30pm** at the Continuing Education Centre, Castlemaine. This will be the first AGM of the group and we are arranging for an interesting speaker. Supper will be provided."

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING -

Roadside Damage In the March "Grass Clippings", the Native Grasslands and Grassy Woodlands newsletter of the VNPA , there is much concern that, despite the number of Grassland Conservation reserves, such as the 400 ha Cragieburn G.C.R, that are being added to the system, the number of new private contractors being used to do maintenance on railways and roadsides has meant that "at least one fenced and signposted site was damaged", a stand of plants listed as threatened under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee act was wiped out, and "there is extensive damage to high quality roadsides in Southwest Victoria".

To quote the "Grass Clippings" article again ,"The threat of summer fires, and reduced manpower in rural areas, has led to the replacement of regular burning by the catastrophic use of broadscale herbicide sprays .... Even sites with signposts declaring 'Significant Native Vegetation' have been destroyed."

The same dismay has been expressed by Club members at the destruction caused by the contractors on the sewage line from Maldon. As Maldon shire was the first to have a Roadsides Conservation Values study carried out, and the report and poster was issued by the Mount Alexander Shire Council after amalgamation, we are left wondering what was the point of the whole process. Our concern will be expressed to Council.

Again, to quote "Grass Clippings", "This native vegetation is protected under the FFG Act, and *anyone* who kills or disturbs it without a permit is breaking the law - no person or organisation is exempt".

A Burning Issue. A conference to discuss shifting the firewood and escalating fuelwood industries from woodlands to plantations is being held on June 8 and 9 at Latrobe University, Bendigo Campus. Further details will be sent later from the organisers, Jason Doyle, 9650 8296 and Karen Alexander Tel/fax 5968 4651 of Vic. National Parks Association. Leaflets are available.
On the day after the conference, Sat June 10, there will be a meeting to discuss the EEC report. The time and venue to be confirmed.

Creswick Landcare Centre is holding a series of Management Workshops on
a. The riparian zone, on April 7, May 12 and June 9?
b. Remnant vegetation, Aug. 11, Sept. 8 and Oct. 13.
Full details are available from the Secretary.

Margaret Hunter, who has been an active member of the club, serving some time on the Committee, has shifted to South Australia. The Club wishes her well, trusting that she will find a satisfying niche in her new situation. We will miss her articles and willingness to represent the Club on various environmental issues.

Bendigo Area **Bird Atlassing** outing - June 4, to Myers Creek via Sebastian. Meet at the Senior Citizens centre, Old High Street, Golden Square at 9am. Please contact Ann Bridley (5449 4379) or Bev. Culvenor (5442 1983) if attending.

CFNC PROGRAMME

EXCURSIONS **General Meetings** are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street. **Excursions** leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days.

Business Meetings are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Fri. Apr. 14 **The Diggings Project.** The speaker is Ian O'Halloran, who is one of the guides. UCA hall 8pm

Sat. April 15 **A visit to the Diggings Project**. Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30 pm. Leader is I. O'Halloran.

Fri. May 12 Speaker is Alan Reid. subject to be confirmed.

Sat May 13 **The Broken Bridge, Eddington.** Leader, E Perkins. Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm.

Sat-Sun May 20-21. **Swift Parrot Survey** Details next month.

Fri. June 9. **Castlemaine Botanical Gardens** Speaker is Kevin Walsh. UCA hall, 8.00pm

Sat June 10. **A tour of the Gardens with Kevin.** Leave 13 Mostyn St at 1.30 or meet at the Rose Garden Car park at the gardens.

Fri. July 14. **Our favourite places of interest in Victoria**. You probably have a favourite nature spot that you like to visit, camp for a weekend or spend a week or two. Share it with the Club, with a few slides or photos to lure us with, and info. on place, distance, camping grounds and facilities, or motel accommodation if you can. Put your thinking caps on and be ready to contribute.

Sat July 15. **Fungi, Bullarto Reservoir.** Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm.

Something to think about - There is a real possibility of a Campout at Glue Pot station in South Australia in the spring in either September or October. Chris Morris is looking into it. We will possibly spend three nights on Glue Pot, but will need to have at least one overnight stop getting there and returning. Interested!?

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2000 Committee M. Dredge (President) ph 5470 6474E. Perkins (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.). ph. 5472 2513, J. Turnbull (treas.) ph. 5474 3005, R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner, Z . Thomas. B. Maund .

Subscriptions for 2000 -

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